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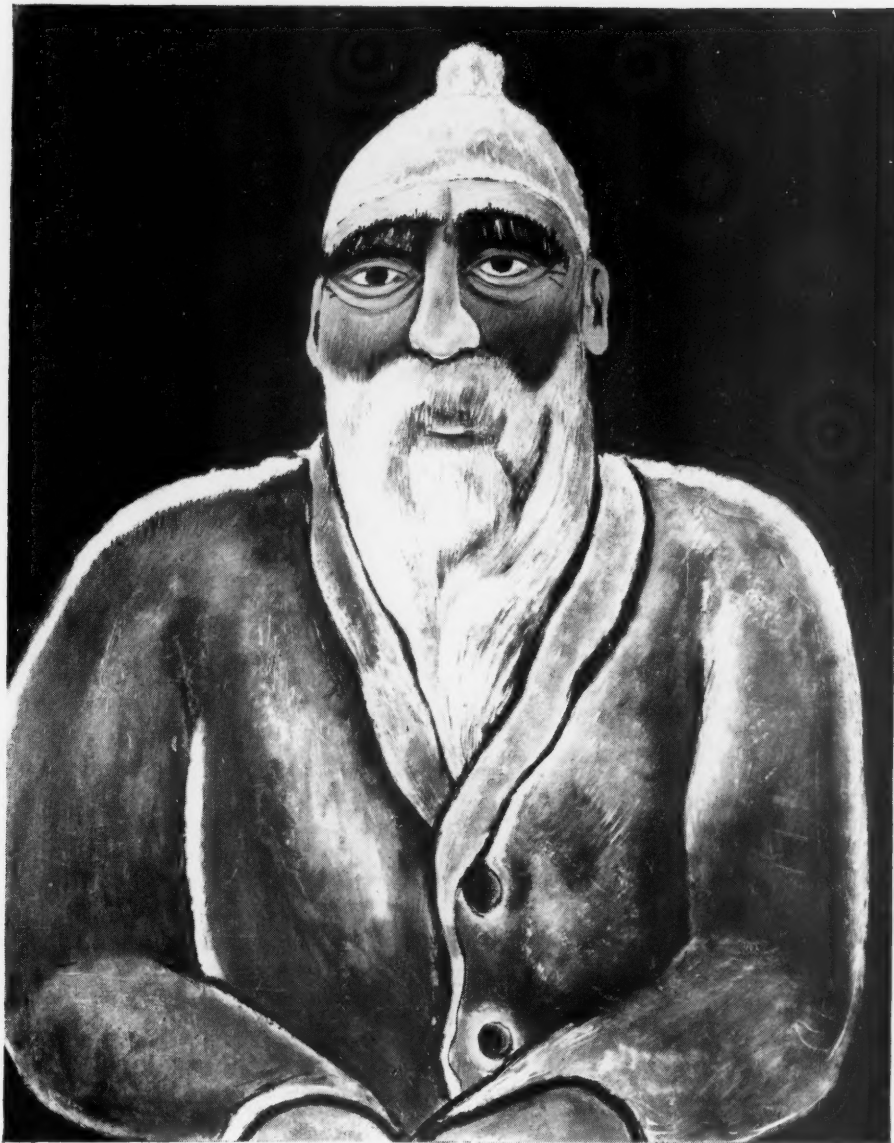
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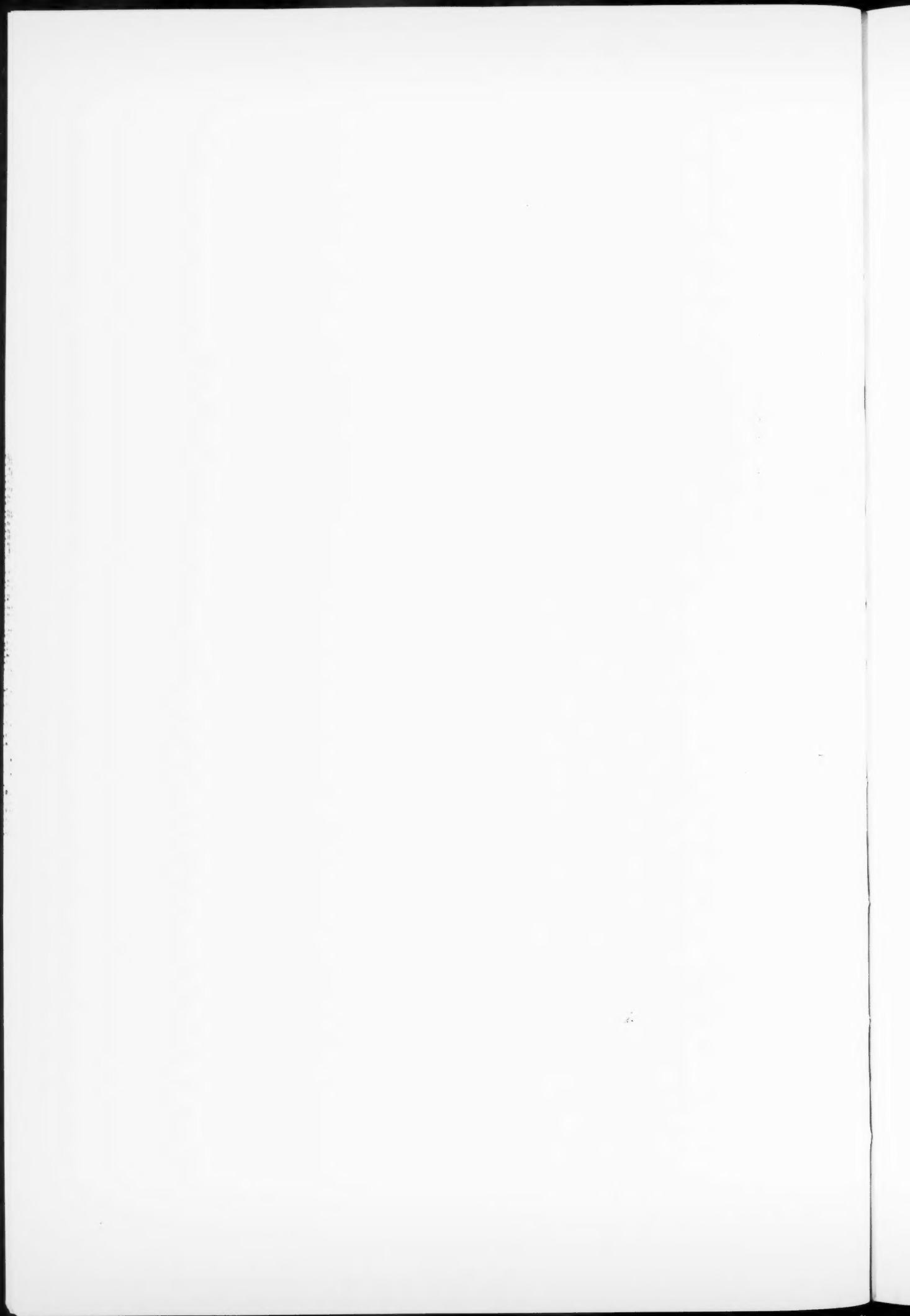


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Marsden Hartley: Portrait of Ryder

Dedicated to Promoting the Study of American Art



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This Is Our Fortieth Anniversary Volume

The Return of the Native: Marsden Hartley

By ELIZABETH MCCausLAND
New York City

I have lived the life of the imagination, but at too great an expense.

— MARSden HARTLEY

Marsden Hartley might have written: "I have lived the life of the pioneer, but at too great an expense." Without question the expense was great; the history of Hartley's life is lonely, bitter, accusing, often agonized, as may be read in his paintings, poems, essays, and letters.

Without question Hartley was a pioneer; posterity may decide if at too great an expense. With Stieglitz's other first-born — Alfred Maurer, John Marin, Arthur Dove, and Max Weber — he channeled modern art into the main stream of early twentieth-century American painting. For twenty years after his debut at 291 in 1909 (until he renounced "isms" in 1928) he painted skilful impressionist, cubist, fauvist, expressionist, and abstractionist works which are a part of the native inheritance. Then, in an essay on "Art and the Personal Life," he wrote: "I can hardly bear the sound of the words 'expressionism,' 'emotionalism,' 'personality,' and such . . ." Ambivalently, he continued: "All the 'isms,' from impressionism down to the present moment, have . . . clarified the mind and the scene . . . the eye that turns toward nature today receives far finer and more significant reactions than previously . . ."

In the beginning Hartley sought creative fulfilment in revolt and experiment. Educated in the American naturalistic tradition, he (like most of his generation) abandoned his tradition. In the end (unlike many American artists then and now) he returned to his tradition. In nature he found that nourishment he had not found in theoretical and formal adventurism. His pioneering was thus not the breaking of trails or the widening of boundaries but the establishing of continuities with the past and the charting of horizons first scanned by his predecessors then studied anew by him.

There is a fable in Hartley's history. His search was wide, and it led him away from his familiar world. He traveled like a dismal guest upon this earth; but he did not find what he was seeking in "isms," as he testifies, or in new places and faraway countries, in France, Germany, Italy, or Mexico. After years of searching of mind and of heart, of style and of

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place, Hartley solved his impasse by sinking roots in that life he had abandoned, in that tradition he (with his generation) had rejected. He returned, then, to nature, to pioneer once more.

In our period of aesthetic variety and confusion, Hartley stands apart from prevailing modes. Today "nature" is not a fashionable theme for the artist, nor is it stylish for the artist to look outward to the objective world. Subjective formalism replaces technical formalism, and the current vogue grows more powerful: the voice of authority proclaims that the frontiers of aesthetics are subliminal territories ruled by the unconscious.

May it be that in a short quarter of a century the mid-century's artists will solve *their* impasse by returning to the tradition of realism?

I

As a boy in Maine, one read the news items in the paper after October, and the casual daily report — So-and-So lost in the woods, perished of hunger and cold, and often never found until the thaws of spring, and it is exactly the same today.

— MARSDEN HARTLEY

So Marsden Hartley wrote of that long decade in the 1900s when he lived on four dollars a week in the Stoneham valley, near Lovell, Maine, painting and seeking to understand the purpose of existence. He set forth his philosophy in letters written in 1900. As he traveled to Lewiston, his birthplace, he noted that the country was so beautiful and the color so glorious that he was nearly wild to get right out and paint. The foliage was just budding out and he was eager to paint the tender spring colors. He hoped before many days to get out to beloved nature and there find happiness and comfort. The painter from Maine, as he proclaimed himself much later, wrote grandiloquently that his one aim in life was beauty, beauty in character, thought, word, deed, and expression on canvas. Lamenting his lack of education, nonetheless he did not consider technical accomplishment to be art; and he was aware of his need to develop his color sense.

The turn of the century did not confront the artist with issues as sharply defined as those presented by the mid-century. The twentieth century began with a simple faith. Hartley's amateurish impressionism (as revealed in the earliest known work from his hand, a landscape, dated on the back in Stieglitz's handwriting "1907?") is a measure of the teaching art students had at the Chase School and the National Academy of Design, as witness niggling little brushstrokes and a pallid palette of arbitrary "complementary" colors. In 1900 students had no well-advertised masters of genuine

achievement to whom to turn. Homer, Eakins, Ryder had no popular following such as those of the facile impresarios, Whistler, Sargent, Chase. It was a fortuitous miracle that Hartley came to know of Ryder, stalking



Fig. 1. Storm Clouds, Maine — 1908 (Oil on canvas, $30\frac{1}{2} \times 25\frac{1}{2}$)

Storm Clouds shows the Segantini influence which dominated Hartley when he first broke away from academic naturalism. Hartley's earliest known painting (except for student work) is signed, lower right, EDMUND MARSDEN Hartley, the only example of Hartley's signature in this form located.

through Fifteenth Street at night; for fame came to Ryder only after his death, and belatedly then.

It is not strange that American artists lost their connection with the native tradition. In four centuries Americans had not been able to break

the European mirror — in politics or economics, or in aesthetics. Estranged from the schools and possessed by a passion for nature, Hartley sought elsewhere for a tradition. This he found in the Italian-born Giovanni Segantini. More than twenty years after, Hartley wrote that in painting mountains he learned more from Segantini than anyone. Segantini had died in 1899, the year Hartley enrolled in the Chase School. He had won gold medals in Amsterdam, Paris, and Turin, but he was not known in the United States except through reproductions in art magazines and possibly through color prints. How did Hartley become acquainted with his work? Perhaps through German color reproductions such as those which have been in the Metropolitan Museum of Art for over forty years.

Yet the influence was strong, as comparisons show. Hartley's *Storm Clouds, Maine* (Fig. 1), dated tentatively 1908, shows the divisionist brushstroke which Segantini had evolved independently of the French masters of impressionism. The modified complementary colors are put on in broken dots or points; and the cloud forms are related to such forms as may be seen in Segantini's *Vergehen*. As he grew more confident of his ability to control the technic, Hartley used the method with a free eye and brush. His *Carnival of Autumn*, 1908 (Fig. 2), has a paint surface composed of many little squares of yellow, blue, red, green, put side by side for the eye to mix into the seeming hues of the observed visual appearances of nature. Thus Hartley broke the mirror, not of European style, but of American naturalism, employing a personal impressionism to obtain the effects previously obtained by illusionism.

This canvas serves a double purpose, aesthetic and historical. In passing we may note that the dating of Hartley's work is complicated by the fact that contradictory dates have often been written on the backs of his paintings, by himself and by Stieglitz. *Carnival of Autumn* is conclusively bracketed by a verbal description in the October 1909 "Camera Work." In May Stieglitz had given Hartley his first one-man exhibition. The critic Charles H. Caffin discussed the young artist under the title of "Unphotographic Paint: — The Texture of Impressionism." Among other subjects he noted "mountain slopes covered with autumn woods with some island-dotted river winding along their base." The river and the island may be seen in the lower left-hand corner of the painting. Since the scene shows autumn foliage, the date 1908 is established.

Caffin discussed also "the depth and distance across the valley . . . , the plastic modeling and faithful detail, the hardiness and vigor of representation" of the picture. He believed that Hartley had invented his method

himself up there in Maine and that only gradually did he learn "to reproduce nature in her most intense and luminous coloring." Even when depending on European inspiration, Hartley remained true to nature!



Fig. 2. Carnival of Autumn — 1908 (Oil on canvas, 30 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{8}$)

The Segantini influence is even more marked than in *Storm Clouds* (Fig. 1). Impasto is heavy, and the *points* of paint are laid on in an arbitrarily organized pattern of complementary colors. This canvas was exhibited at Alfred Stieglitz's Photo-Secession Gallery, 291 Fifth Avenue, New York, in May 1909. At that time critic Charles H. Caffin commented on Hartley's "mountain slopes covered with autumn woods with some island-dotted river winding along their base."

Hartley's debut may be considered a critical success; but his circumstances were still difficult and depressing, despite a grant of \$4 a week

from the veteran art dealer, N. E. Montross. In 1910 he exhibited again at 291, with other younger American artists. The work done in 1909 is shadowed by a dark cloud, however. Hartley had become aware of Ryder as a painter. For nine years he had seen the master's eerie figure in the dusk on Fifteenth Street. Now he saw him as a fellow artist. At the Montross Gallery he saw a picture which so affected him that he was never the same; "for," he wrote, "the power that was in it shook the rafters of my being." It was "a marine . . . — just some sea, some clouds, and a sail boat on the tossing waters."

An idea had been planted; from it came Hartley's "black landscapes" of 1909, and again echoes in his recollections of New Mexico painted in Berlin in 1922. One of the finest of the 1909 series is *Deserted Farm* (Fig. 3). The cloud forms no longer resemble Segantini's but Ryder's; and the brushstroke is inspired, not by a mathematical optical formula, but by an inner frenzy which results in a loose, emotional manner of applying paint. The impact of Ryder as an artist explains the change in style; but what explains the change in mood? Stieglitz wrote on the back of a "dark mountain" painting that "Hartley undoubtedly was on the verge of suicide during the summer which brought forth this picture." Hartley himself wrote many years later that he could not think of his life at Lovell without loathing. Why? These are questions which are still to be answered when, and if, personal documents become available.

Hartley underwent a quick succession of influences. Stieglitz had exhibited Cézanne and Picasso at 291 in 1910 and 1911. Hartley reacted strongly; and his landscape and still life paintings of these years show cubist and fauvist traces. Yet he did not desert the object; the blue jug, dark plantain, and livid cucumber mentioned by critics are recognizable. Indeed he never completely abandoned the objective for the nonobjective. Even when he had gone abroad in the summer of 1912 and been swept up into the Blue Rider and Kandinsky group, he painted circles, triangles, and pyramids solidly and recognizably. In Paris he found many other influences. He became a friend of Gertrude and Leo Stein; and he had "a direct vision," wrote the late Paul Rosenfeld in "Port of New York," "of Delacroix, Courbet, Cézanne, Picasso, the 'raging cubists,' van Gogh, Gauguin, . . . [Henri] Rousseau, and Redon."

Yet his constant experiments seem like side-trips, from which he returned to nature as a main highway. Hartley's observation of and re-creation of external fact are perhaps never seen to better advantage than in the expressionist paintings he made in Berlin in 1913 and again in 1914/1915. As

Germany celebrated the hundredth anniversary of Napoleon's defeat at Leipzig in 1813, Hartley observed and no doubt delighted in the pomp and ceremony of prewar pageantry. His second "Germanic" group was painted

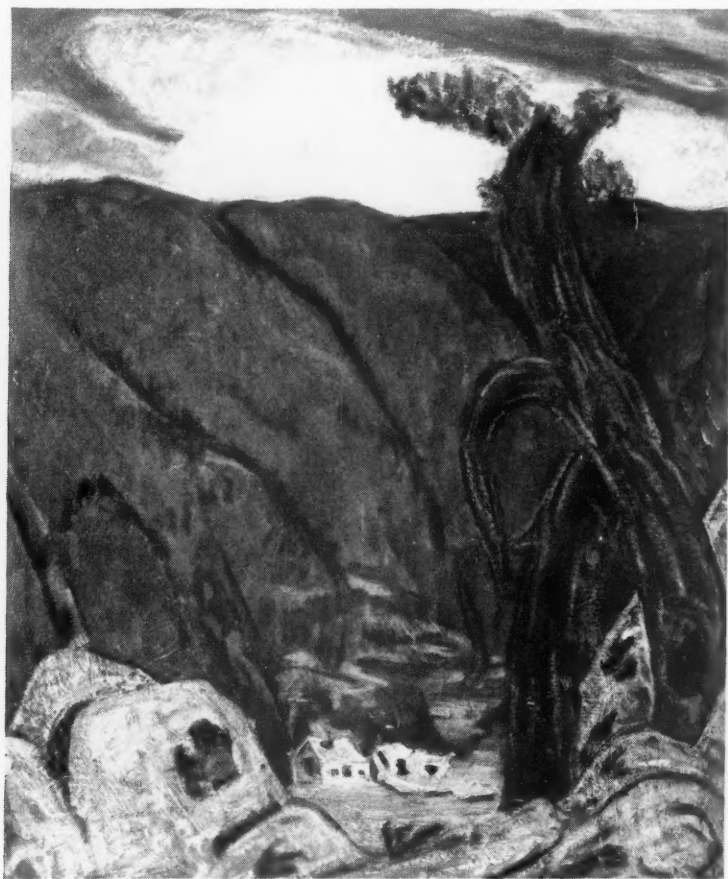


Fig. 3. Deserted Farm — 1909 (Oil on composition board, 24 x 20)

Hartley next came under the influence of Albert Pinkham Ryder, whom he used to see striding at night along Fifteenth Street in New York. The artist has recorded that he was powerfully affected when he first saw a Ryder marine. Of Hartley's *dark mountain* phase, Stieglitz left a note on the back of one of the series: "Hartley undoubtedly was on the verge of suicide during the summer which brought forth this picture."

just before and just after the outbreak of World War I; and the mood is hectic and expressive of the violence of history, fragments of the visual world reconstituted in new relations to express the rapid tempo of the changing pictures of a rapidly changing world.

These large canvases — entitled *Military, Portrait* (Fig. 4), *Portrait*

of a German Officer, Warriors, and the like — are not symbols, Hartley explained, but his notion of “the purely pictorial.” He stated in the catalogue for his 1916 exhibition, held in New York after he had gotten his paintings through the British Navy’s blockade: “The forms are only those which I have observed casually from day to day. . . . I have expressed only what I have seen. They are merely consultations of the eye.” Fifteen years later Hartley wrote to an inquirer that the paintings represented a collection of numbers, designs and letters seen by him at the beginning of the war in Berlin — military in their nature, of course, and pictorial arrangements of things seen and felt.

The two Berlin series are a riotous montage of forms observed casually from day to day. The catalogue of items is long: Guards officers, immaculate in white dress uniforms, with gleaming black dress boots. White feathers blowing back from the dress *Helm mit Federbusch*. Gold and silver braid in intricate embroidery (*Stickerei*). Rowels of spurs like stars. Silver and gold tassels dangling from the handles of dress swords. Regimental banners and pennons waving from gold-tipped staffs. Ancient flags of Bavaria, Saxony, Oldenburg, Württemberg. The figures 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, and the letter *E*, on regimental “patches” and “tabs,” piped in various colors. The Iron Cross, often painted red instead of black. Heraldic markings on the horses’ saddle blankets. All these and other as yet unidentified fragments fascinated Hartley.

His paintings of what he had seen and felt follow nature closely. Note the letter *E* in *Portrait* (Fig. 4). Had there been a crown above the letter, the insignia would have identified the Queen Elizabeth regiment of guards. Without the crown, the insignia denotes the Bavarian Eisenbahn regiment. Similarly in the large expressionist canvas of the same series, now in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the initials “K.v.F.” stand for Hartley’s German officer friend, Karl von Freyburg, who was killed early in World War I. More detailed study could doubtless read much more iconographical data from these paintings.

II

. . . like all pioneers, [he] was without prescribed means, [so] that he had to spend his life inventing for himself those terms and methods which would best express his feelings about nature.

— MARSDEN HARTLEY

Hartley was describing Cézanne’s historical predicament; he might have been describing his own. His enforced return to the United States in

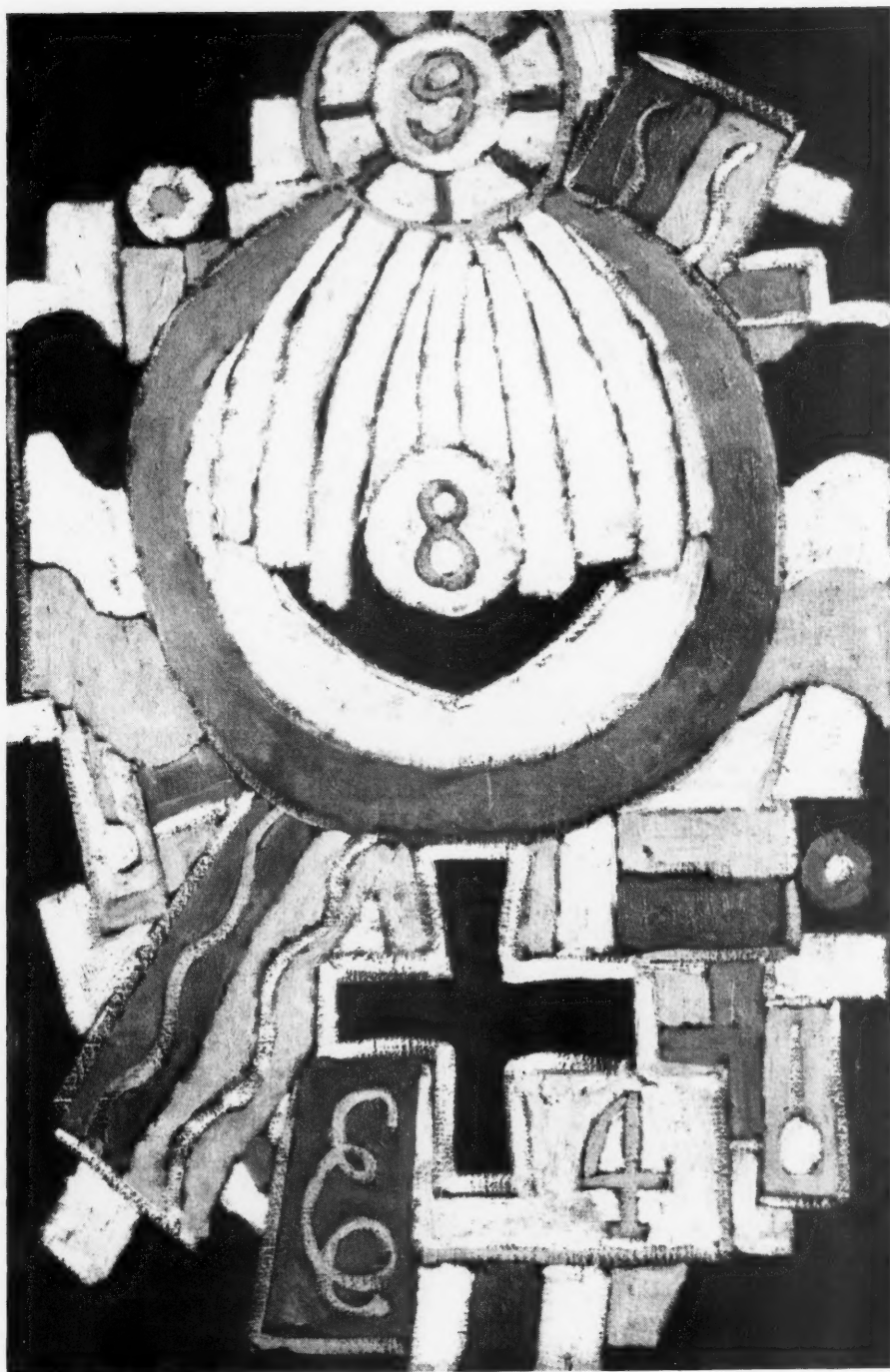


Fig. 4. Portrait — 1914/1915 (Oil on canvas, $31\frac{3}{4} \times 21\frac{1}{8}$)

Hartley painted his first "Germanic" series in 1913, his second in 1914/1915. Military pomp and ceremony attracted him in prewar days and again at the outbreak of World War I when he portrayed "things seen and felt" in Berlin. Many elements can be identified — Iron Cross; German imperial black-white-red flag; dress uniform helmet with white feathers; regimental numbers and the letter *E* to designate the Bavarian Eisenbahn regiment; and an epaulette.

December 1915 plucked him from a congenial environment and returned him to an uncongenial. His happy life in Germany gave place to a wandering existence, made precarious by the fact that in 1917 Stieglitz closed his gallery and ceased publishing his house organ, "Camera Work." Seeking to stabilize himself, Hartley passed through many styles — from the two-dimensional abstractionism of the Provincetown "movements" through the first Bermuda "window" paintings of 1916/1917 to the New Mexican landscapes of 1918/1920 painted hot from nature, incandescent in the blazing earth colors of that semi-desert land.

Nature as a guide to art played a contradictory role in Hartley's work at this time. The years of the first world war were not easy for most American artists, especially older men. In Hartley's case search and research occupied his attention. From Bermuda he had written a friend early in 1918 that his reverence for nature was not all keen, not nature just for itself. Yet soon afterwards Hartley wrote Harriet Monroe, editor of the vanguard magazine "Poetry," from New Mexico, in March 1918, calling for an honest return to nature. He had added that cubism and futurism had shown their limitations not because of their insincerities but their false premises. Something of his own contradictions may be read in the fact that he wrote of wanting to visit the Southwest for an escape.

Yet Hartley could not deny the allure of nature. Much later he would write of the "nativeness" of Maine. Now he found the *land* of New Mexico rich and wonderful and marveled that he never saw Americans sticking to their own soil. The beautiful arroyos and canyons were, he felt, living examples of the splendor of the ages, as classical as the art of Claude Lorrain. He was bewitched, he wrote, by their magnificence and austerity; and New Mexico was the only place in America where true color existed. He made an exception of New England's short autumnal season, which he felt to be a classic in itself. He mused, too, of returning to the hills of Maine, where he had made himself famous among painters. Go back he did before he died, and on that work his fame may rest.

As he worked away at daring pastels of the arroyos and canyons, he found time to revalue his artistic thinking. He was convinced, he wrote

Harriet Monroe, that art was swinging back to reality and even to realism. In such a mood he painted colorful oils of the New Mexican scene, which became increasingly simplified in form and color as time went on. But by



Fig. 5. Still Life — 1923 (Oil on canvas, 20 x 24)

After a decade of aesthetic storm and stress, Hartley experienced a period of creative calm, in which his painting forms became solid and stable, as in this handsome still life. Elegance was always an attribute of his personality, elegantly expressed here.

the time he had returned to Berlin, to paint in 1922 his "recollections of New Mexico," his mood was overshadowed, as it had been in the "dark landscapes" of 1909. Once again he turned to Ryder, in a mood not less somber than before. Twisted trees and lowering clouds make his remembered New Mexico a blighted heath — Wuthering Heights, he wrote, such as Emily Bronte had not known.

In this characteristic oscillation of mood, Hartley returned to experi-

mentation on his return to Europe in the summer of 1921. He took a recess from nature, as it were, and plunged again into abstractionist-cubist still life, painting his many compositions of fruit in a manner reminiscent of Braque, as may be noted in the handsome *Still Life* of 1923 (Fig. 5).

In the next years nature again became Hartley's main theme. In 1924/1925 he worked at Vence in the south of France, painting in a hard mannered style as if he would cut the natural elements out of paint. For a short time he sketched feverishly in the valley of the Chevreuse. About 1926 he moved to Aix-en-Provence: the Riviera tourists had become too much for him. At Aix he would take up where Cézanne had left off; and he forthwith appropriated the magic mountain of Cézanne's vision, Mont-Sainte-Victoire. His manner became suave and subtle. It did not, however, approach the profound plasticity of Cézanne's style; it remained a surface superimposed on a subject. Not, indeed, until he had returned to the United States and painted *Franconia Notch* in the White Mountains in 1930 did he assimilate Cézanne's postimpressionist method. In *Beaver Lake, Lost River Region*, 1930 (Fig. 6) Hartley made the manner his own: his neatly divided, carefully laid-on brushstrokes are organized not for the sake of a technic but for the content he seeks to communicate. A decade of theorizing has come to a solution.

During this decade Hartley had been fortunate to have patrons who subsidized him for four years. Yet relative material security did not solve his problems. These were creative and expressive, and perhaps personal, as well; and money alone was not the answer, though it was surely a *sine qua non* without which other answers would not have sufficed, either. For a year (1927) he did not paint at all; and in 1928, as he wrote a longtime friend, he painted still life to get his hand in again. He had a single ambition, to paint a picture that would look as understanding of nature as a piece of Maillol's sculpture. He was eager, also, to work out his ideas in the burning light of the south of France. Consciously or unconsciously, he was a child of light as our painters have been to an exceptional degree, precisely because the North American continent offers a vast range of contrast of light and atmosphere.

He toyed then with the idea of returning to the United States and getting to some really wild places; but he was basing his thinking more and more on those facts of the external world which he had described in 1915 as "consultations of the eye," things seen and felt. He thought that mathematicians had it all over poets and philosophers because they got close to solid substances. In a manuscript poem sent a friend, he wrote that he

would that all these sacred elements were proud to hear him speak this much aloud. The dusty residues he wrote of would later be proud to be his immortal residue in painting. As he grew older, he admired the endur-



Fig. 6. Beaver Lake, Lost River Region — 1930
(Oil on canvas, 35 x 30)

In the middle 1920's Hartley came once more under the influence of Cézanne, whose inspiration he had first known in 1910. Working at Aix-en-Provence, he drew and painted Cézanne's *Mont-Sainte-Victoire* hundreds of times, with a rapid staccato tempo, seeking to take up where Cézanne had left off. The Cézanne inspiration continued after Hartley had returned to the United States. It may be seen illustrated in the brushstroke of *Beaver Lake*.

ingness of nature, and its stoicism. He asked, when the heart is turned to stone, what remains? and answered that it is the thing itself, alone.

III

The Androscoggin, the Kennebec, and the Penobscot flow down to the sea as solemnly as ever, and the numberless inland lakes harbour the loon, and give rest to the angles of geese making south or north according to season, . . . If the Zeppelin rides the sky at night, and aeroplanes set flocks of sea gulls flying, the gulls remain the same and the rocks, pines, and thrashing seas never lose their power. — MARSDEN HARTLEY

Hartley traveled a vast distance from the intellectual and emotional attitudes of 1930/1931 to the spiritual position of 1937 when he wrote so movingly of life and nature. He had written Harriet Monroe in 1931 about an issue of "Poetry" announced as "objectivist." He commented that the theme interested him since all art was swinging back to reality. There was no other alternative, he thought, and as regards painting it was a comfort to find the best artists returning to solid things. He himself had returned to objective nature in painting and hoped one day to be known as a fine realist. The world was tired of subconscious extravagances, and artists were learning that lesson very rapidly. After all no one cared what a private neurotic life divulged.

On his return to his native land reality had proved hard and unpalatable for Hartley. In 1930 he had recorded his experiences in painting *Beaver Lake* (Fig. 6) with certain reservations. After a fling at summer tourists, not unlike his distaste for visitors on the Riviera, he wrote that there was Lost River for his special adoration, and what a beautiful place it was, what a handsome spectacle! One could go way down into the chasm among the huge boulders that volcano peevishness shook down into it after the glacial fatigue. Here was a fact he could build on, but still a hard and almost brittle fact. His facts of nature would later become round and warm and alive with the strength of the feeling he grew to have for them.

Excursions into the past encouraged Hartley in his return to nature and reality. He had seen a lot of the Egyptians at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and was in love with their coolness, their superb contempt for personality and all the riff-raff egotism that was called art those days. They were so close to their subject. They were so much more elegant than the Greeks, and all those hieroglyphs were so superbly done, each one a perfect image in itself. Most of all he admired the naturalism which Egyptian art achieved through contemplation. In the end Hartley himself achieved a superb naturalism by means not unlike those of the Egyptians: surely contemplation is the source of the moral and plastic strength felt in paintings like *Robin Hood Cove* and *Camden Hills* (Fig. 10).

After his return to the drastic reality of depression-decade America, Hartley sought to orient his painting by reference to objective, identifiable subjects in nature. The life of the mind (or of the imagination) was



Fig. 7. Garmisch-Partenkirchen — 1933 (Oil on board, 29 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 22)

To paint the mountains which obsessed his vision, Hartley traveled from Maine to Provence to New Hampshire's Franconia Notch to Mexico's Popocatepetl to the Bavarian Alps' Garmisch-Partenkirchen and finally back to Maine's Katahdin. Strong in color and form, his Alpine peaks echo influence less than his earlier works. The naturalism which in retrospect seems to have been Hartley's guiding aesthetic may be noted in this series. Winter draws on, and the paintings grow colder in palette. The canvas reproduced was painted in the fall of 1933, although the series continued till the end of the 1933/1934 season.

reserved for later years when the material circumstances of his existence were ameliorated. Meanwhile he seized on specific, concrete objects with a fierce energy as if he would bite on the bullet. The great Emily Bronte had missed the blighted heath of New Mexico, and she had missed the weird stretch of landscape at the top of Cape Ann. Painting at Gloucester, he went alone empty-handed to sit on Dogtown Common and then painted his *Dogtowns* from memory. The scene was all boulders and scrub and really quite handsome if he could be so moved by the sight of landscape. He looked at it and registered it and the two paintings he had made were, he thought, very speaking likenesses of the place. It was very stark, very mythical, with an out-of-the-world look. He had captured that look, he believed. Certainly *Dogtown*, 1934 (Fig. 8), confirms his belief.

Such was his return to physical nature. Nature in a broader sense had always occupied his thought. Certain themes dominated his imagination throughout his life. Such a theme is mountain as idea, seen in his paintings from 1908 to his death. His concepts grew richer and deeper until his image ceased to be a literal scientific transcript of nature and became a powerful visual expression of the meaning of the mountain as it impinged on the artist and through him on his audience. Only three years elapsed between *Beaver Lake* (Fig. 6) and *Garmisch-Partenkirchen* (Fig. 7); but the change is already marked. He might have painted the Alpine peak as scenery — he had written of his visit to California in 1919 that there was no landscape there, only scenery — but instead he painted his subject in all its power and glory, the visible sign of an invisible splendor. Finally he painted Maine's Katahdin in a subtle range of keys, muted and full orchestra, in the seasons of the year and in the moods of the heart. At last the mountain lived as itself, "satisfied / that so much of the substance of things is / itself."

Hartley had looked inward rather than outward most of his life. It was not adversity but opportunity which mellowed his character and warmed his view of existence. Now he learned to spell nature, human nature. Nothing is more heart-warming in Hartley's late blooming than his newly found love of simple people. He had been an elegant frequenter of art circles; but, as his letters reveal, he felt strongly his inability to relate himself with his fellow human beings. Later he had formed friendships but struck no deep roots. Now he found nourishment in homely, human ties.

In 1935, after a year in Mexico and another in Germany, Hartley had come back to the United States for the last time. From Bermuda he went, in the fall, to Nova Scotia. He wrote it was wild and tense up there, noble

in spirit and devastating to human endurance. There he grew to love the stalwart fishermen, the busy housewife who tended to his material needs, the old women of the village who spun their wool and knitted socks, always white, the great bears of sons, the pervading gentle kindliness of all. His



Fig. 8. Dogtown — 1934 (Oil on masonite, $15\frac{7}{8} \times 28\frac{1}{4}$)

Hartley's interest in nature was not confined to the panoramic and the grandiose. At Cape Ann he found a compelling theme in the moraine's geological chronicle of the ice age, which he painted in 1931 and again in 1934 and 1936. On the back of one of the Dogtowns in the Walker Collection (the 1931 *In The Moraine*) Hartley added as a footnote a quotation from T. S. Eliot's "Ash-Wednesday":

Teach us to care and not to care
Teach us to sit still
Even among these rocks

perception of the virtue of such qualities grew more intense when death tragically struck home to the family with whom he lived.

Of the sons, "Two Drowned at the Gateway," he wrote: "They walk the waves at night — / all night they sleep beneath." Again, in the poem "Fishermen's Last Supper," he wrote: "For wine, they drank the ocean — / for bread, they ate their own despairs." In painting, his *Fishermen's Last Supper* (Fig. 9) was to be an epic of such lives and deaths. He painted two versions of the theme, of which that reproduced is the first, and he always hoped that he might paint a mural for a fishermen's bethel in the north country. This intimate knowledge of death enriched Hartley's spiritual perceptions, and it made it possible for him to lay an old ghost.

Hartley had always feared the idea of death and shrunk from the dark knowledge with which man lives from birth. His dark mountains of 1909 were his first overt acknowledgment of the fact of death; no doubt his remembered New Mexico of 1922 carried a dark burden, likewise. The death of a German friend early in World War I was a bereavement he did not forget. When his friend, Hart Crane, committed suicide in 1932 by leaping from the New York-bound *Orizaba*, Hartley found it hard to overcome his own withdrawal. He painted a memorial to the poet, *Eight Bells' Folly*, in a dark mood. His choice of words shows how reluctant he was to accept finality; it is folly to die by one's own act, he implied, whether at midnight or high noon.

Yet death is being's inescapable substance, as life is. Slowly Hartley mastered this truth. As he lived close to reality, he grew compassionate and tender. He did not need to remember the pity of Ryder's *Dead Bird* to paint the dead sea birds of Maine with pity. Yearly the eider ducks flew down from Labrador, and each fall and winter death overtook some of their number. Along the shore the lonely painter walking found victims of storm and gale or hunter's gunshot. How frail is his *Dead Plover* (Fig. 11), how defenseless against nature and against man. He might almost have painted his last work, *Roses* (Fig. 12), as a lamentation for them. For, in one of his late poems he had written: ". . . even sea gulls love the shape of roses."

Yet life, as much as death, is the condition of being. Nature is the intangible but indestructible substance of the human spirit as much as the constantly changing but perhaps never exhausted matter of earth, water, and air. "Husbands and sons are drowned at sea," Hartley wrote in 1937, "and this is just as natural to hear as if they died of measles or of a fever, and these men are pretty much as children always, go to their death without murmur and without reproach." He wrote thus, as if to exorcise death. When he came to paint the subject the next year, his mood was less detached: he painted the grief-stricken family with all the depth and passion of his somber memories. Look at the weight of the hands of father, mother, daughter, and lost sons. They press heavily on the table: there will always be vacant places there.

Death may be "natural." But it is tragic, too; and no amount of words and no amount of art will heal grief lightly. All art can do is to express the truth that the tragedy of life is not a little thing, but a great thing, that the sorrows of human beings are at least as important as technical tight-rope aesthetic acrobatics. At the same time, there is a further mean-

ing. The great beauty of human beings is that they are indestructible. The soul has a courage which can surmount tragedy and transmute tragedy into moral victory. How amazing that after years in the sophisticated art

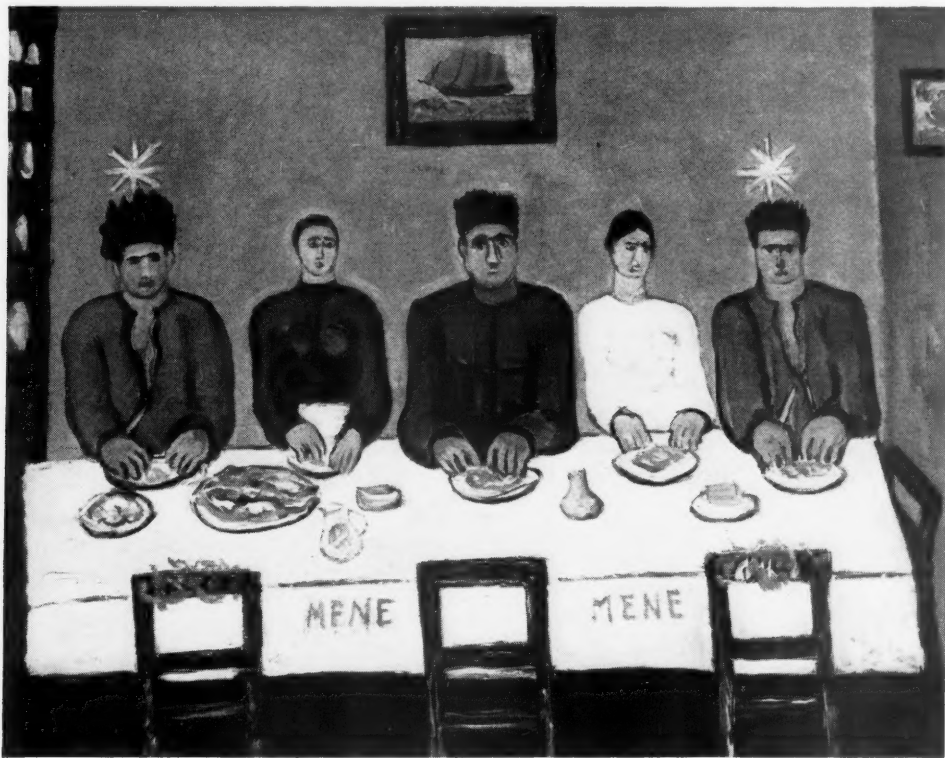


Fig. 9. Fishermen's Last Supper — 1938 (Oil on academy board, 22 x 28)

In his memorial to fishermen drowned at sea, Hartley painted father, mother, daughter, and the two sons, who had not heeded the handwriting on the wall of "Mene, Mene." As earlier, in the death of Hart Crane, and later in his many dead sea birds, Hartley found death a compulsive and yet a liberating theme. Hartley painted both this, his first version, and a second version of the theme as preliminary studies for a mural which he hoped might sometime be painted for and placed in a fishermen's bethel in Maine.

world, Hartley escaped that trap and came back to truths that endure. How large, how durable, are his people. They stand for the survival value of all human beings; that reality Hartley sensed and expressed.

Thus, if man cannot be destroyed, his life has a significance beyond the daily round of labor, self-maintenance, and biological replacement. Men's lives thus are noble and splendid, marks at which others may aim. Hartley

saw Ryder as such a monument of human dignity. "Ryder was," Hartley wrote, "majestic in his gray wools: sweater, skull cap to match, with a button of wool at the top . . . This cap came down to his shaggy eyebrows which were like lichens overhanging rocks of granite, the eyes that they now tell me were brown I thought, of course to be blue, thought them blue probably because blue eyes seem always to be looking over desperate horizons . . . There was the heavy mustache, and the long flowing beard, all lichen gray, merging into the heavy gray wool of his clothing, all a matter of protective coloration, without doubt having something to do with Ryder's shyness." So Hartley saw Ryder, and so he painted him (Cover). How true to nature his memory portrait is.

Truer than life is Hartley's observation of Lincoln in the three portraits he painted. For Hartley, Lincoln's was "the one great face." "I never tire of looking at it," he wrote, "I am simply dead in love with that man." He painted Lincoln bearded, and he painted him without a beard, in *Young Worshipper of the Truth*. In native folklore, Hartley renewed his connection with the American past.

Hartley found a bridge from his youth to his maturity in affirmation of nature as his creative and philosophical source. He concerned himself more and more with the persistence of life, the dignity of survival, the indestructibility of matter. In 1909 he painted waterfalls as exercises in technic; he painted waterfalls in the 1930s as lovely forms. Finally he painted *Waterfall, Morse Pond* as the solid spirit of remote places, somber and shadowy, lacking sunlight summer and winter, shaded always by the pines. In withdrawn places such as these polar privacy was attained and the self sank deep into contemplation, unharried by tempests which swept less isolated scenes. Not form as such, but the essence of matter was Hartley's objective now. How far he had come from the surface expressions of storm and stress.

Though Hartley found himself in nature, he did not save his soul by recourse to quietism. For the first time he became aware of the dignity of work. He had written patronizingly of French "peasants;" and in 1930, when he was over fifty years old, he had his first experience of packing his paintings for shipment to New York. To be sure, he frequently kept house for himself, did the cooking, cleaned up the pots and pans, and washed out his socks. But he did not seem to know that the world is built on the daily labor of hard-working, uncomplaining billions. When he came home to Maine, he began to understand this organic and inescapable truth. He learned of the beauty of work from his Nova Scotian fisherfolk; and he

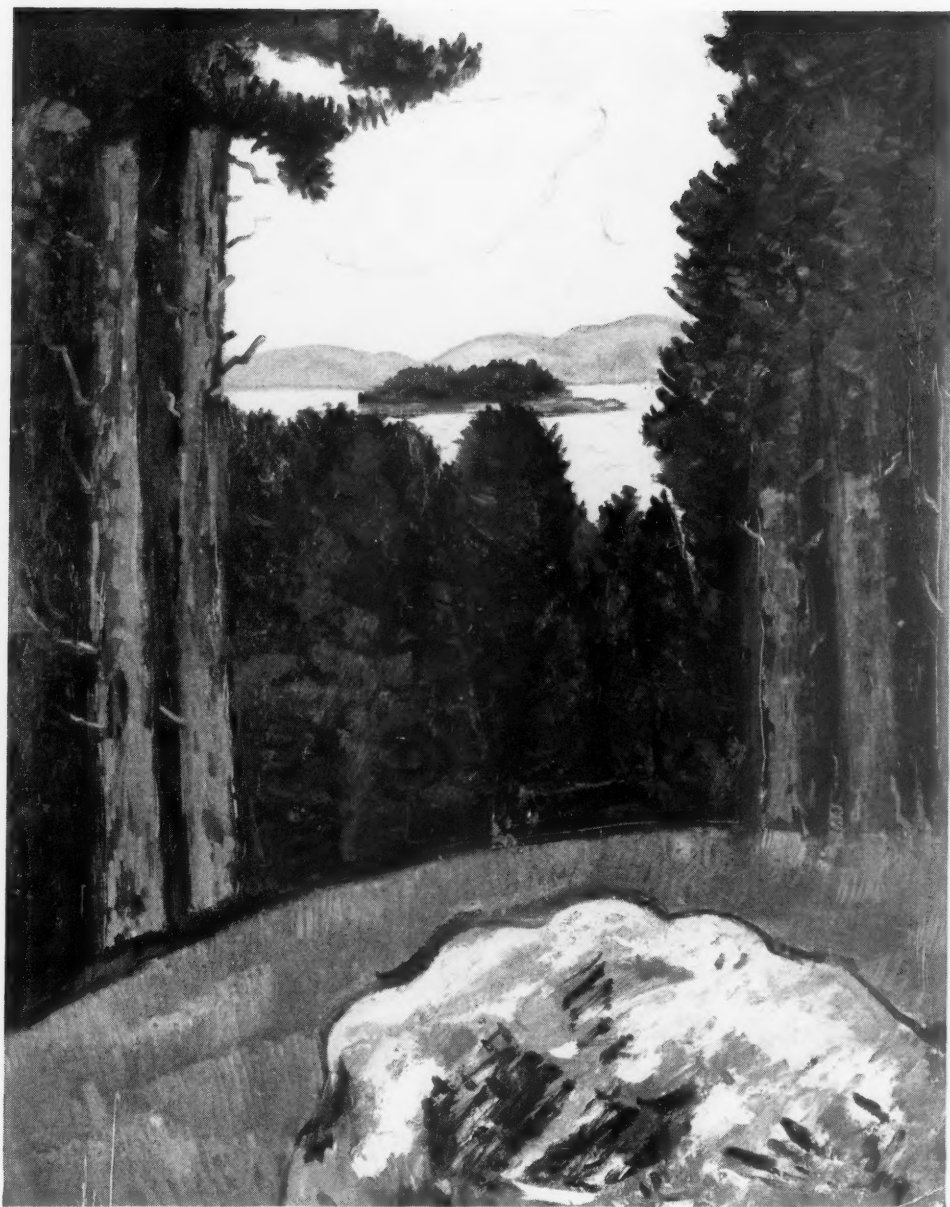


Fig. 10. Camden Hills from Baker's Island, Penobscot Bay — 1938
(Oil on academy board, 28 x 22)

At the end of his life Hartley lived and worked in Maine, the painter from Maine come home, "... listening all the while to the slow, rich, solemn music of the Androscoggin, as it flows along." Except that it does not scan as well, he might have written this of the Penobscot. Through the "window" of the dark firs, Hartley looks out on nature with a vision far

different from that of his 1916/1917 Bermuda "windows" or his 1920 New Mexican ones. As time went on, he ceased to make use of nature for his own personal comfort but rather grew to express nature in its own right and for its own sake.

learned of it again from the Maine lumberjacks. When the great log jams floated down the Maine rivers, he realized that behind their triumphant harvest lay stupendous labor, desperate forest fires, lives poised on the brink of death.

Deeper grew his insight. How far can the eye look into matter? The human apparatus for apprehending the objective world is not as acute as an electronic microscope. Can emotion, thought, and the synthesis of one's memories of the past be as efficient as a machine? We hope so, or there would be no function for the arts. Hartley saw ever more deeply into his subjects. In his last paintings he came to the mood he described in a poem. He wrote of all those "who have done with the / wanderings and finger playings" and praised "the moment come at last when [they] can profoundly say:"

'Come sky, come earth, come night and day,
come dream —
let us live together quietly.'

Quietly, but how deeply, how richly, Hartley lived with nature now. How deep, how rich, is the physical world of *Robin Hood Cove* and *Camden Hills* (Fig. 10). One looks through the "window" of dark firs, not to the shining Bermudian bay where gay sailboats move but to an eternal and unchanging world. Of the world which never changes, but always changes, Hartley wrote:

The Androscoggin
changes nothing of its flowing — . . .
Nothing is changed,
nothing is different but ourselves
who note the change that brings us back
to nothing changed.

Nonetheless there is change, Hartley added, "But here is a change." Here is a change. The world has changed, and time has changed, and the artist has changed. The easy light moods of youth and the hard dark moods of youth are not the moods of maturity. Time holds the content of all that has happened from then to now. What is that content? Perhaps (we say) a common awareness and valuing of what human beings share —

their humanity and their physical universe, their fragile lives and deaths, their need for love and their need for home, their loneliness and their hunger to feed loneliness. Hartley wrote of shared universal experiences,



Fig. 11. Dead Plover — 1942/1943 (Oil on masonite, 16 x 20)

"Roses for sea gulls that lost their way at sea," Hartley wrote of another painting. His creative life came to an expressive climax in the compassion and fellow-feeling he showed for the victims of existence, whether dead sea birds or drowned fishermen. The dead plover came to its death by a gunshot, as the bright blood on its breast shows. Other gulls and robins died from storm and hurricane. Hartley saw the migration of ducks from Labrador to Maine, and he saw the sea birds overtaken by the elements. Few have painted the fate of small living things with more tenderness.

and he painted them. In so doing, he returned to the main road of humanistic realism.

Hartley changed, and by his change he epitomized our period, and he instructed it. Gertrude Stein wrote of Alfred Maurer, that he was always searching, searching, searching. Not these two pioneers alone but most artists of our time have been searching, searching, searching. And for what?

Formalistic adventuring in the arts has been rationalized by present day theory into scientific experimentation. Has an art worthy of our age



Fig. 12. Roses — 1943 (Oil on canvas, 40 x 30)

In New Mexico in 1920 Hartley had painted flowers as still life with a debonair air. In Paris in 1928 he had painted floral still lifes to get his hand and eye in again after a period of total abstention from painting. He painted Lachaise's garden at Georgetown, Maine, in 1937. Finally he painted roses as if with a foreknowledge of his own approaching death. This, his last canvas, stood on Hartley's easel in Corea, Maine, at the time of his death on September 2, 1943.

resulted? Twentieth-century man appears in art documents as a faceless, formless, mindless, soulless surface decorated with automatic writing. Yet the potential of our century of limitless energy liberated by the atom is vaster than that of any past age. What does such an age say of itself? If the arts are to be believed, only that man is impotent and will-less, that chaos is the better part of wisdom, that negation is the prime end of creativity.

Hartley explored and renounced the wasteland of theory. He learned that nonpurposeful adventures in the arts could not satisfy him. He returned to man and nature, but with a wider view, a greater reach. Academies of naturalism could fulfil him no more than academies of abstractionism; yet his experiences with modern styles gave color and force to his revived realism. His was not a mechanically recidivist return to nature but an advance in expressiveness which fused the old tradition and the new experiment. His example suggests a philosophy for the artists of our time who face a dilemma no less acute than Hartley's. Surely he grew stronger and more creative. Might not the artists of today also?

Cannot Hartley's new strength be read in his late work? Time and whatever suffering he underwent have carved away the superficial and left the enduring. He had renounced, rejected, scorned, despised the soil out of which he came. In the end he returned to that earth, to strike roots once again, seeking to find not peace and solace but meaning for his life and work. The native thus returned, and thus he wrote his epitaph:

He who finds will
to come home
will surely find old faith
made new again, . . .

a sea gull signs the bond —
makes what was broken, whole.



Fig. 1. Abraham Ross Stanley: Nellie Jane Manning
State Historical Museum, Madison, Wis.

Three Wisconsin Primitives

By KENNETH R. HOPKINS

State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin

DUE IN large part to Jean Lipman, Thomas Flexner, Alice Winchester, and others during the last few years, there has been a tremendous growth of interest in American "primitive" painters. All but completely neglected for decades, the American folk painter suddenly has become, almost overnight, a topic for serious discussion and historical study. This is, of course, all to the good. The importance of the untrained artist may at times be overstressed by enthusiastic researchers, but it is quite apparent that the local artist, the itinerant, the primitive, the Sunday painter (call him what you will), filled a need in our society before the inroads of industrial development. Most certainly the artistic honesty of the early artist was typical and reflective of his time.

We owe much to Jean Lipman for her ceaseless unearthing of hitherto unknown American folk painters and craftsmen. It is only natural that most of the currently available data on the primitive painters should concern those of New England, New York and Pennsylvania. Yet in the Middle West we feel that although our history is shorter, our early artists are quite as accomplished and quite as culturally important as those in other sections of the country. That we have reason to feel a certain neglect may be illustrated by pointing to the recently published volume, "Primitive Painters in America, 1750-1950." In this book there is included a listing of some 600 primitive painters in America during the last 200 years. It is probably the most complete study to date on the American popular painter. Earle Newton, editor of "American Heritage," has called it the authoritative volume on its subject.

Out of these 600 painters, only 17 are artists from the Middle West and 11 of these are from the single state of Ohio. I feel justified in expressing regret that Paul Seifert alone was recorded by author Lipman as the single Wisconsin primitive for its first 100 years of statehood. It is unfortunate the author of this otherwise fine work failed to investigate thoroughly the "outer regions" in research for the book.

Perhaps this is an unjustifiably harsh comment on an excellent work. My only intention, however, is to point out by this illustration and by further specific examples that Wisconsin, at least among the mid-western states, has had its own fair share of primitive painters within a fine tradition of

folk art. This article then, is something of an answer to Miss Winchester's hope to "hear more of primitive painting in the West . . ."

A recent exhibition held at the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Art Institute, "American Primitive Art, 1750-1850" recognized the stature of certain of Wisconsin's own early painters by including 17 Wisconsin artists in the 100 works shown.

The Museum of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin loaned two paintings from its own collection to this exhibition. Following this Milwaukee showing, the Madison Museum planned and presented an exhibition of primitive painters from its own collection of paintings. The Historical Society feels confident that this first public showing of an entire exhibition of Wisconsin's early artists is a milestone in bringing proper recognition to the hitherto unpublished primitive artists: Charles Dahlquist, John Gaddis, Abraham Ross Stanley, Mrs. Freelove Pope, Elmina Pelton Briggs, Isabella A. Dengel, and other anonymous Wisconsin painters.

Probably the most outstanding among these Wisconsin painters were the trio, Dahlquist, Stanley and Gaddis. Dahlquist (he was called "Painter Charlie") painted mainly landscapes while Gaddis and Stanley concerned themselves more often with portraits. Gaddis, however, did numerous drawings of army camp scenes when he was with the Union Army in the Civil War.

Alice Winchester has written that "the artist and his art are so inevitably interrelated that consideration of the one without the other loses meaning." Perhaps because of his tragic life, Dahlquist seems to qualify as the most interesting of these newly discovered Wisconsin primitives. Swedish born, "Painter Charlie" spent much of his life in America at the Dane County (Wisconsin) Home and Hospital. Situated some six miles west of Madison in southern Wisconsin, the old and uncared for of the county come here to end their days in the peace and quiet of the beautiful countryside.

It was on January 8, 1887, that Charles Dahlquist, itinerant, painter, and alcoholic, found himself committed to this Home by Judge A. B. Brady of Verona, Wisconsin. The charge against him was formally listed in the records as "intemperance." He had spent his last penny on a fine spree in the local taverns. Having no money left and no job, he voluntarily accepted this court suggestion. This was to be only one of twelve recorded entrances to the Home over a period of fifteen years. Dahlquist was sixty-three at the time.

The records of the Home, kept by sympathetic Jesse M. Meyers, Super-

intendent of the Home in 1887, state, "he came here a whiskey wreck and yet well educated and an excellent workman."

It is interesting to note that Dahlquist at this time recorded his occupation as "painter." This refers to house painting and not to his practice as an artist as we commonly use the term today. There is some reason to believe he had worked professionally in Chicago as a painter, perhaps with the Pullman Car Company, although there is no record available to support this other than hearsay. It is extremely doubtful that he received any formal art training, for his painting has all of the qualities and characteristics of primitive painting.

Dahlquist spent a turbulent 15 years at the Home. Being well-liked and popular among the other residents and staff, he found ready sympathy for his troubles and a real friend in Jesse Meyers. The superintendent at times supported Dahlquist from his own pocket and Dahlquist in turn found Meyers' little daughter, Della, a cheerful companion.

Dahlquist was undoubtedly a well-known figure in the local village of Verona both to the barkeepers and the townsfolk. He might well have been the village "character" known for his eccentricities in both painting and drinking.

A fine old woman resident at the Home, Miss Lizzie Dorman, still clearly recalls "Painter Charlie" of some fifty years ago. She is the only known living link to Dahlquist's life at the Home. According to Lizzie Dorman, Dahlquist used to talk about the family he had left in Sweden. Apparently he had come to this country alone, leaving his wife and daughter to come on later — perhaps after he was able to earn their passage. They never followed. Either Dahlquist never desired to have them come — which is doubtful — or he found it more difficult to earn a living here than he had assumed. Whether this failure in reuniting his family led to his habitual drinking or the squandering of his earnings in this way prevented his family's passage to America, we'll never know. But regardless, he was a lonely Swedish emigrant, bitter in his solitude although, as Lizzie says, he was a witty man and everyone liked him. The records bear this out.

Dahlquist's paintings were popular with the local people. He was willing to paint whenever he had the materials available and gave the paintings away or sold them for very little. Unfortunately the income from any sales usually was spent in a grand drinking spree, with the artist returning to the Home penniless and often ill. Jesse Meyers wrote on August 8, 1892, that he "came back worse looking, if possible, than ever. Lousy, and dirty and watch and clothing gone. Oh, such a wreck!"

Even Lizzie Dorman remembers this particular excursion. Apparently he had received a gold watch from a "Colonel Turner" (we are dependent upon Lizzie's memory for this name otherwise unidentified) for a painting



Fig. 2. Charles Dahlquist: Dane County Home
State Historical Museum, Madison, Wis.

and promptly went to town where he pawned the watch and drank up the proceeds. At other times he pawned clothing and once, in 1894, is recorded as having stolen clothing from employees at the Home to "get whiskey with." This is his only record of any variance with the law other than intemperance. For this he was again committed to the Home at the request of Jesse Meyers whose patience was being sorely taxed by Dahlquist's fondness for the bottle.

Dahlquist's life ended, according to the Home records, on December 15, 1902. He had "committed suicide by hanging in his room. Had been suffering from stomach trouble. Removed by Dr. Cutter."

It was the evening of a pre-Christmas celebration at the Home. All of

the residents were gathered in the large living room when Dahlquist appeared, gravely shook hands with everyone, said "good-bye" and went upstairs to his room directly above the gay party. Later when they called to him to join the festivities, he was discovered hanging behind the door of



Fig. 3. Charles Dahlquist: Asylum at Verona
State Historical Museum, Madison, Wis.

his room. Lizzie Dorman told me this story of Dahlquist's death which she apparently remembers clearly after all these years. Dahlquist was buried in the cemetery near the Home.

How may we assess the importance of this primitive artist's painting? As with most other primitives, his painting satisfied and appealed to those people who knew the artist and for whom he painted. He brought art to the bare walls of the home and pleasure to those who by necessity had few pleasures in life. He did not paint primarily for money — although he did not hesitate to sell his work. Untrained in formal art terms, he had a natural sensitivity and a technical facility rarely noticed in primitives.

His painting obviously brought him great personal pleasure; probably the only happy hours of his later life (other than those under the influence of drink) were during his periods of painting effort.

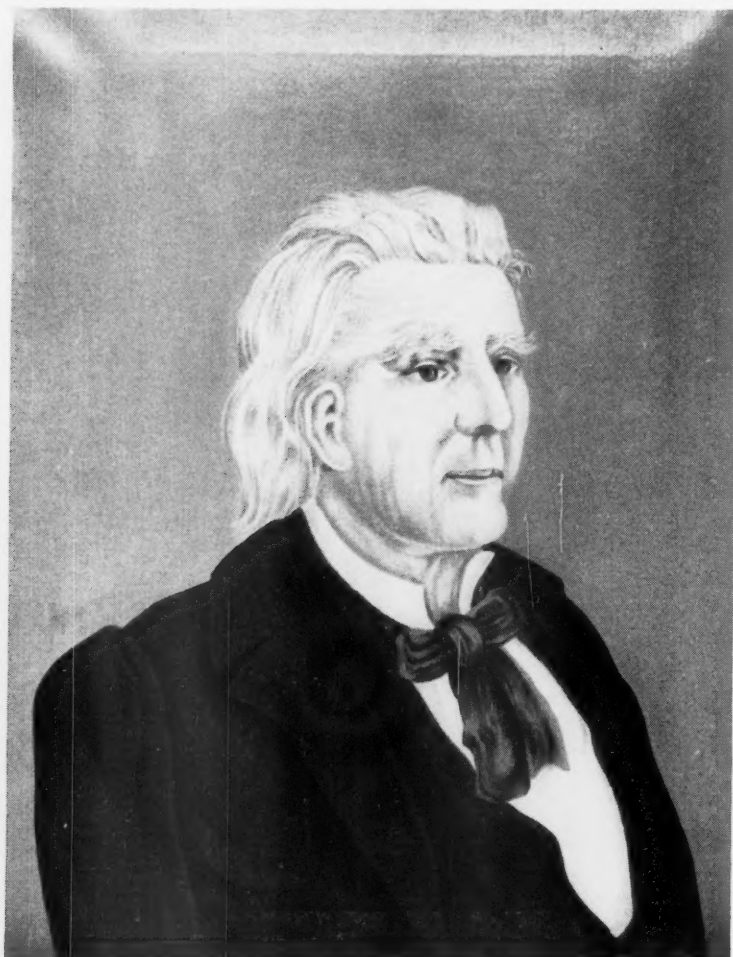


Fig. 4. Charles Dahlquist: Ole Bull
State Historical Museum, Madison, Wis.

Painting as a hobby, he undoubtedly understood his limitations. His portraits are surely far inferior to the landscapes he did so well. All of the works existent today, to our knowledge, were painted during his tenure at the Home. He painted many views of both the Home and the Dane County Asylum directly across the highway (Fig. 2 and 3). Not only did Dahlquist paint, but he did craftwork and carving as a pastime also. His hand carved chests and pounded copper bowls are owned by several fam-

ilies in the state. Probably many are in existence which have never been attributed to Dahlquist.

The State Historical Museum owns six paintings by Dahlquist. Of these,

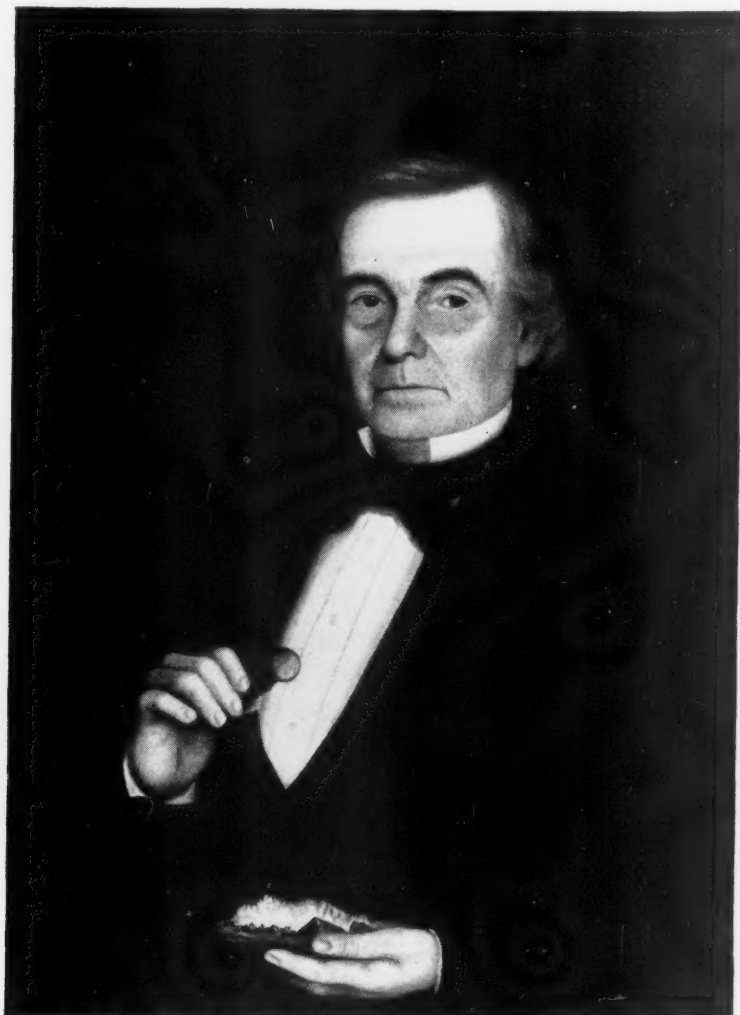


Fig. 5. Abraham Ross Stanley: Moses Meeker
State Historical Museum, Madison, Wis.

two are summer views or springtime views of the Home and two are winter scenes, almost identical, of the Asylum. Apparently Dahlquist painted the latter during the winter months from his bedroom windows which looked directly out over the front lawn toward the Asylum building. Wisconsin winters make it impractical to paint out-of-doors. The two paintings of

the Asylum are almost identical and it is reasonable to assume that one was a copy of the other. As with all of Dahlquist's paintings, neither is dated.

The two paintings of the Home are the finest of the collection, but unfortunately they are also in the poorest state of physical preservation. The paintings show the red brick building from the front, the perspective distorted in the typical primitive manner. The trees are delicately handled in a meticulous pattern of intertwined branches making a rhythmic all-over pattern against the background. The Home itself is painted in minute detail showing every window shade in its exact position; the bricks are individually outlined as are the shingles on the roof, the steps, pickets, etc. The sky above the building carries on the rhythm of the trees in a sensitive manner illustrating Dahlquist's sense of design and feeling in carrying out a total composition.

The portrait of *Ole Bull* (Fig. 4) was done from a photograph. Bull lived in Madison, Wisconsin, during the 1880's when he was at the height of his popularity. The portrait of little Della Meyers, painted in the same manner, probably was done from life, since Della lived with her parents at the Home and was well known to the artist.

Abraham Ross Stanley represents the historical as well as the artistic tradition of Wisconsin's middle 1800's. He is a descendant of the good Betsy Ross and felt proud of her name in his signature. Stanley was born in New York State on March 16, 1816. There is record of his having art training under an unknown Italian itinerant artist in Herkimer County, New York, sometime before 1830.

Stanley was not only a painter but a musician of some ability. He played the violin quite adequately and later on found music teaching a secondary source of income.

In 1853, the Stanley family moved to Shullsburg, Wisconsin, presumably to find a better climate for Abraham who was crippled by arthritis. In Shullsburg he set up a studio in a first floor room on Water Street, then the main business street of the town. At the age of fifty-four Stanley listed his occupation as "portrait painter" in the census. Ten years before, Stanley was recorded as "jeweler."

The Wisconsin State Historical Society Museum has in its collection three portraits by Stanley: *Moses Meeker*, *Absalom A. Townsend* and *Nellie Jane Manning* (Fig. 1). The Manning painting was recently included in the Milwaukee Art Institute's exhibition of primitive art.

Nellie Jane Manning was a little six-year-old girl who died suddenly in 1873 of spinal meningitis. After her death Stanley began the portrait

as a gift to her saddened parents because he was fond of the little girl who had often visited his studio. To make the portrait as authentic as possible, Abraham Stanley brought many of Nellie's personal belongings to the studio. The portrait shows the little girl dressed in an orange merino dress with black scallop trimming. In addition she wears a black silk ruffled pinafore. A comb with its plaid silk ribbon bow is holding back her hair. A string of pearl beads with a gold-clasped, cornelian pendant hangs about the little girl's neck. On her right hand is a cornelian ring and she holds a red rose, her favorite flower. Nellie's red leather Bible lies on the marble topped table. Nimble Dick, Nellie Jane's gray kitten, sits on the floor. (The cat was actually black in color, but Stanley felt that with so many other dark objects in the picture, the kitten ought to be lighter in tone.)

The painting is primitive in style with a meticulous technique and attention to detail. It is a formal frontal view with the figure stolidly composed and unsmiling.

During Stanley's life, southwestern Wisconsin was a prolific lead producing area. Here the pioneer mine owners became suddenly rich. Many of these ruddy-complexioned miners were painted by Stanley and the portrait of *Moses Meeker* (Fig. 5) depicted one of the more prominent early mine owners. He is shown as a kindly, intelligent man, holding a magnifying glass in his right hand and a lead sample in his left. He is dressed in the costume of the period complete to black stock tie. The painting is essentially primitive in its handling and in its harsh characterization quite reminiscent of the American eighteenth-century painters.

John Gaddis was a Wisconsin farmer and soldier who painted in his spare time. He was probably born in 1822 in Ireland, but the date of his immigration to the United States is not definitely known. He apparently lived in Illinois for some time prior to 1850. He then lived in Chippewa County, Wisconsin, until his death in 1892 or 1894.

Gaddis enlisted in Company E, 12th Wisconsin Regiment during the Civil War, entered service in 1861 at Madison at the age of thirty-nine. This Wisconsin unit took part in the siege of Vicksburg, Sherman's March to the Sea, and in the Carolina campaign. He was mustered out at Chattanooga on the third of November, 1864, with the rank of corporal. Gaddis had been more or less considered the company artist and did many such sketches of army camp life. Some of these are owned by the DAR Museum in Madison.

The portrait of *Mrs. Peck* (Fig. 6) is a simple, direct treatment of an old lady who obviously possessed not only great strength of character, but a

caustic sense of humor. The emphasis in the painting is on pattern and contours, done in flat color simply applied. The portrait, as most primitive portraits, is greatly concerned with presenting an individual without

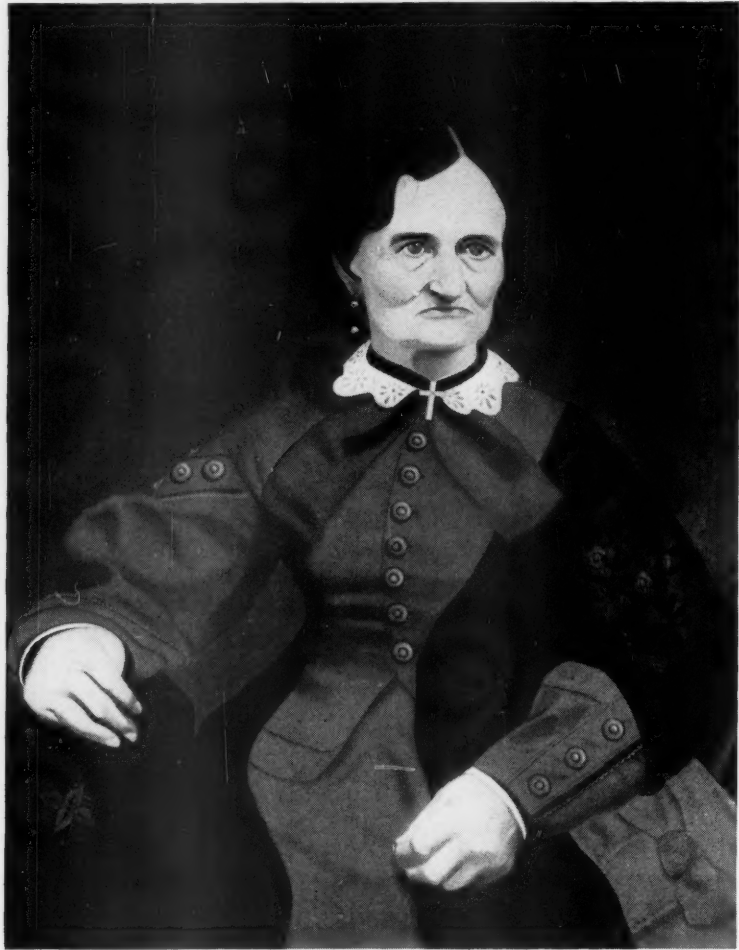


Fig. 6. John Gaddis: Mrs. Roseline Peck
State Historical Museum, Madison, Wis.

fear or favor.

Where do these three Wisconsin artists stand in relation to American art? Probably no better nor little worse than any of the some 600 or so other recorded primitives. All have their unique characteristics, their personal flavor, and the flavor of the early Middle West. Dahlquist's art is more technically proficient and more nearly a personal expression than that of Gaddis or Stanley. He is without a doubt the most sensitive of the group.

None of the three is sophisticated, as no primitive could be. All are observant artists.

Wisconsin, in the second half of the nineteenth century, was not a place which dealt out easy living on a silver platter. Winters were long and summers often unbearably hot. Farming usually meant clearing land before one could set out fields. Farm, village, and town alike, were made up of hard-working people with little spare time. Even today this is essentially so. An artist had little opportunity to practice his art if he was to support a family; Gaddis was a farmer; Stanley at times a jeweler, a postmaster, and a music teacher. Dahlquist was a painter who found the strain too severe and became a pauper and drunkard. That these men found time to paint at all and that their work received ready favor among their acquaintances is an eye-opening commentary on those supposedly tight-fisted pioneers of the early West.

In addition, there is the place of these painters as recorders of historical fact. They painted the persons and places which made history in early Wisconsin, and for many of our impressions of a man like Moses Meeker, we are indebted to just such portraits as the one done by Abraham Ross Stanley.

Wisconsin had its quota of early artists who contributed their invaluable part to the building of the state. Popular art, though slow to arrive and relatively small in quantity, did flourish in the early days of the west.



Fig. 1. Matthew Pratt: Christiana (Mrs. Hugh) McCulloch
Robert C. Fose Galleries, Boston

Three Portraits by Matthew Pratt

By ALAN BURROUGHS
Little Compton, Rhode Island

AS SEVERAL critics have recognized, Matthew Pratt was one of the most personal and subtle of our early artists. But the rarity of his pictures, and the delicacy of their expression, have held back his reputation generally, even among historians who have sought out his work and have had some opportunity to follow his achievement. To the general public he is known as the creator of a single picture, the Metropolitan Museum's group of art students in the studio of Benjamin West, called *The American School*, which is the only signed and dated work, as far as is yet known. Although nine other paintings are in public possession — one of them a commanding full-length of Cadwallader Colden, commissioned from Pratt in 1772 by the New York Chamber of Commerce — few are easily accessible. The frequently mentioned portraits of Benjamin West and his wife, in the Pennsylvania Academy, seem to be known chiefly through reproduction.

Consequently the appearance of three additional paintings by Pratt (Figs. 1, 2 and 3) is an event for art historians and for those who admire unusual artistry. These large, finely colored and intimate characterizations represent the immediate family of a prosperous Philadelphia merchant whose long and healthy life¹ seems to have been as modest as the painter's own. The family Bible gives the basic information, that Hugh

¹Poulson's "American Daily Advertiser" (Sept. 1, 1807): "On Monday the 24th inst. the venerable Hugh McCulloch of this city, departed this life aged 88 years and 2 months. It is remarkable that during his long life he was scarcely ever visited with sickness or pain. He closed the scene at length after a very short illness, occasioned probably by a touch of the prevailing influenza, though a gradual decay was visible for some time before to those about him. Of the deceased it may be truly said he lived and died the death of the righteous. His numerous descendants mourn their loss while they are fully satisfied of his gain." (Reference, courtesy Mr. R. N. Williams 2d, Director of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.)

Hugh McCulloch's will (Philadelphia County, Book 2, No. 87, p. 157 — reference courtesy of Mr. Williams) leaves considerable property to his son James and daughters Jane (Mrs. Solomon Birchhead) and Eleanor (Mrs. Alexander Anderson).

Mrs. Hugh McCulloch died in 1796, and son James in 1836. The fact of latter's membership in the Whig Society is due to Professor Donald Egbert, Dept. Art and Archaeology, Princeton University.

The portraits, each 50 x 40 inches in contemporary frames, descended in the family through James Hugh McCulloch, son and grandson of the sitters, who was a prominent resident of Baltimore (1791-1869).

The relationship between Pratt's friend, Archibald McCulloch, and the Hugh McCulloch family is not yet determined. And it is pertinent to note that the Hugh McCulloch who was Lincoln's Secretary of the Treasury (Hon. LLD, Princeton, 1866) came from a Maine family not closely related to the Pennsylvania McCullochs. Nor does James McCulloch, of the famous early XIXth century Supreme Court case, *McCulloch vs Maryland*, appear to be a close member of the Hugh McCulloch family.

McCulloch was born in 1719, his wife Christiana in 1716, and their only surviving son, James, in 1756. Since James is shown as a young man in an academic robe, the date of the portraits was probably 1773, when



Fig. 2. Matthew Pratt: James McCulloch
Robert C. Fose Galleries, Boston

James graduated from Princeton University, by which time Pratt had settled down in Philadelphia after a trip to Ireland and Liverpool, accompanied by his friend Archibald McCulloch of Philadelphia, for whom he painted at least one picture not yet identified.

Pratt's portrait of himself,² probably painted in London some years earlier, emphasizes the depth and reserve of his character. Charles Willson Peale called him "a mild and friendly man, not ambitious to distinguish

²Reproduced in Dunlap's "History" (ed. 1918) I, p. 110.

himself." But Peale himself was so energetically ambitious that he could easily have misinterpreted Pratt's poise as lack of energy. When Pratt looked in the mirror he saw a calm and sensitive person, patient perhaps,

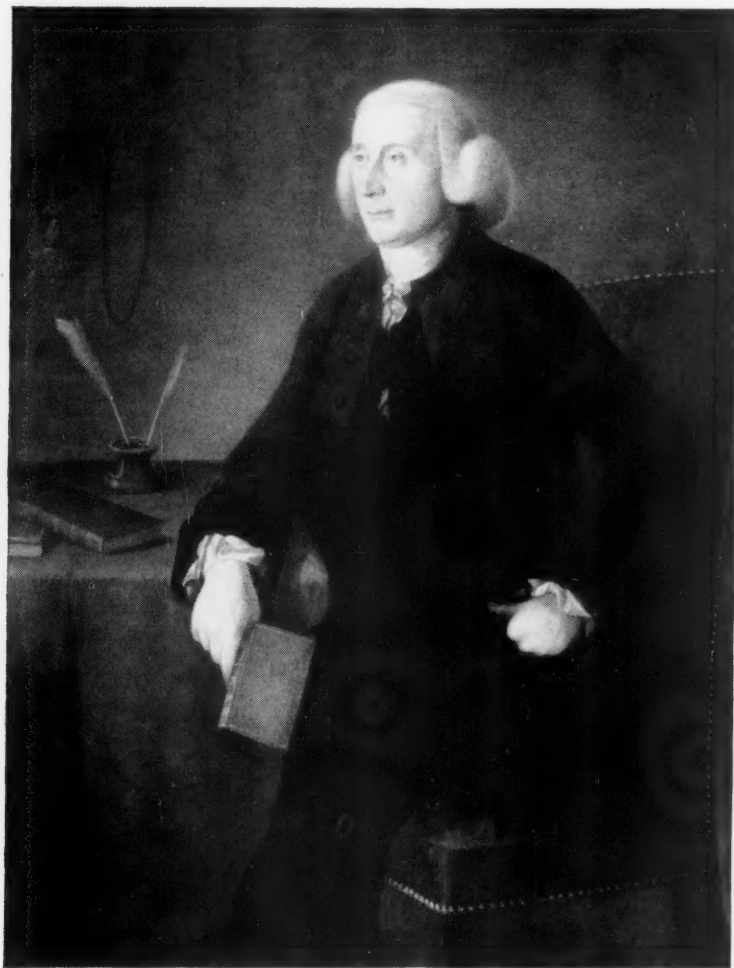


Fig. 3. Matthew Pratt: Hugh McCulloch of Philadelphia
Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Del.

but not an unambitious one. His ease of manner makes his penetrating vision seem casual. He seems highly civilized and capable of taking the trouble to be charming, without necessarily being a flatterer.

The originality of his style is evident in the dignified — almost moody — handling of the unspectacular McCulloch family, posed self-consciously "at ease," with amiable but reticent expressions, suggesting an over-all gentleness of spirit. For all the formality of the scale and proportions, the

portraits are personal, even that of the young man who rises on spindly legs and stretches out his hand as if delivering an oration, as he must have done as a member of the Whig Society at Princeton, a debating club founded

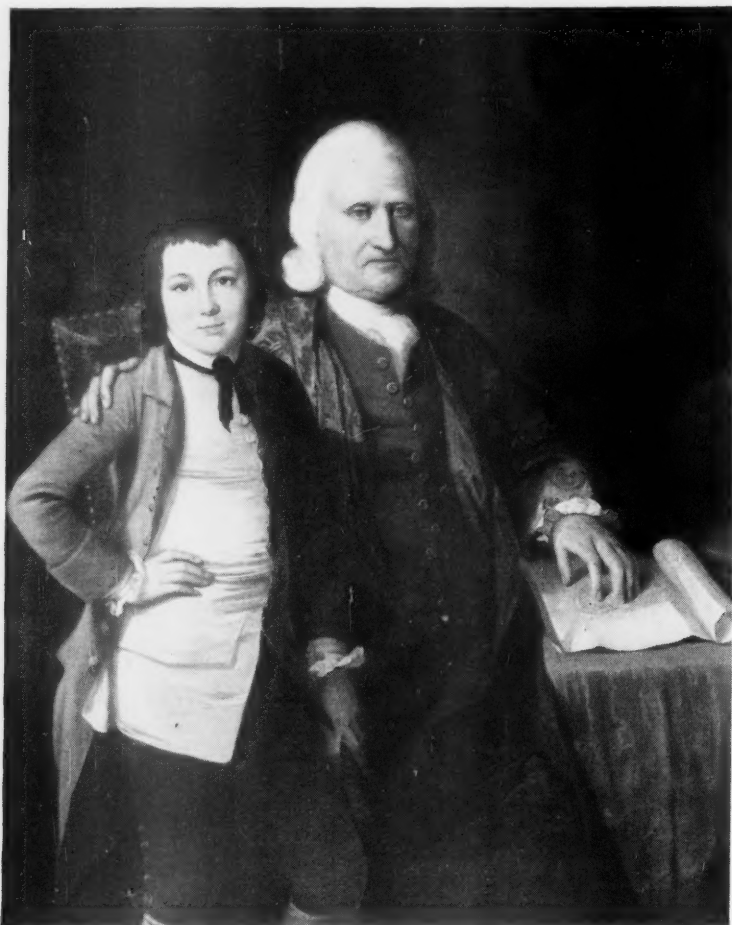


Fig. 4. Matthew Pratt: Cadwallader Colden and Warren de Lancey
Peter de Lancey Swords
 Courtesy Frick Art Reference Library, Mount Kisco, N. Y.

by James Madison only a few years earlier. The chief suggestion of luxuriance or artifice in the handling comes from the cool blue and green tones; and these merely hint at a rich effect.

Here are the qualities which have been noted in Pratt's double portrait of Cadwallader Colden with his grandson, Warren de Lancey (Fig. 4) painted later than the portrait commissioned by the New York Chamber of Commerce, probably about 1775, the year before Colden's death. Simple in pose, refined in color (a soft red and green are prominent), carried out

with a sympathetic understanding of the sitters' mutual affection, the painting is a personal achievement and parallels in structure several details of the McCulloch portraits, especially the hand-on-hip poses of the two



Fig. 5. Matthew Pratt: Mrs. Charles Willing
Mrs. T. I. Hare Powel, Newport, R. I.

boys, the handling of their waistcoats, and the "withdrawn" modelling of the two men, which complements the franker appearance of the boys.

For further confirmation of the attribution to Pratt, the portrait of Mrs. McCulloch should be compared with that of a contemporary middle-aged lady Mrs. Charles Willing (Fig. 5),³ members of whose family were Pratt's

³Mrs. Willing's portrait must be dated about 1770, when she was sixty years old, and not 1784-5, as stated by William Sawitzky, Matthew Pratt, New York Historical Society, 1942, p. 80. His reproduction of the portrait is from a negative no longer available. The present reproductions from an old negative, before restoration, courtesy of the owner. Size 36 x 32, as compared with the 50 x 40 of the others illustrated.

patrons on his return to Philadelphia in 1768, after his London trip. In spite of identical artistic properties, these portraits differ in little details of observation almost too subtle to express in words. The different tensions of the figures, the arm positions (one somewhat snug, the other more expansive), and the posing of the heads, make the ladies differ as in nature (and perhaps in social standing, to a slight degree), and as if in spite of the consistency of the artist's point of view. This is a tribute to his sensitivity.

As a "triptych" to family pride, the three McCulloch portraits expand and at the same time summarize our conception of Pratt's emotional balance and unassuming originality in the realistic tradition of Colonial art. His was a rare personality, tending to the classical in dignity and simplicity, as these newly recovered paintings illustrate in an admirable way.

Letters to the Editor

February 13, 1952
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Dear Sir,

On Friday, February eighth, 1952, at the Centre d'Art, a meeting was held at which the signers of this letter, all concerned in the mural project in the Episcopalian Cathedral here, were present. Obin, the most distinguished of Haitian popular painters, was not able to attend the meeting but had written a letter to the Centre d'Art describing in no uncertain terms his position and Préfète Dufaut, absent in Jacmel, had also instructed us to sign his name to whatever we decided to write. Lévêque, the least important of the group, had not been invited to be present as he is one of the artists the Centre d'Art was forced to expel in the Fall of 1950 for the reason, ironical enough, that he was one of the signers of a series of defamatory articles which had for their main target of attack Rodman and the Haitian Art Center of New York which he was then running. At this meeting Rodman's article which appeared in the December issue of *ART IN AMERICA*, was analysed for us, point by point, by Maurice Borno, President of the Conseil d'Administration of the Centre d'Art, from a translation carefully prepared by him in advance.

We wish to go on record as saying that, apart from several outright lies, the complete tone of Rodman's article deliberately distorts the real issues and is thoroughly dishonest. His implication for instance, that he personally raised money to carry on the mural project is totally false. The funds for the continuation of the project came out of the \$5000 which an American philanthropist, passing through Port-au-Prince and brought into the Cathedral by John Shaw Young, then Special Emissary of the United States to the International Exposition held here in the Winter of 1949-50, promised, on the spot, to give and did give. The balance of \$5000 was to be raised by Rodman in the United States, using, we believe, the name of this American benefactor. But it appears that the letter Rodman sent out asking for funds was so crudely phrased that it produced about \$100, and this largely from old friends of the Centre d'Art. Subsequently, and for no doubt excellent reasons, the aforementioned benefactor refused further to see Rodman who arrived later in Port-au-Prince with \$2500 (\$900 of which he had allocated to himself for expenses); the other \$2500 having been remitted direct to Bishop Voegeli. As to Rodman's "supervision" we willingly admit that a number of the more luridly sensational (and, of course, controversial) details in the various panels were put in at his suggestion. But the basic weakness of this insulting attack on the Episcopalian Church, its Bishop, the Centre d'Art, its Director and ourselves is that Rodman attempts to persuade the reader that, without this "supervision" (supervision by, mark you, a rank amateur in the art of painting!), the murals would have turned out mere chromos — of no artistic value whatsoever. We beg to point out that all of us, with the possible exceptions of the comparative newcomers, Dufaut and Léontus, had done, long before the second coming of Rodman to Haiti, work which had been appreciated and bought by discerning collectors in the United States and Europe.

Instead of claiming almost complete credit for the work realized in the Episcopal Cathedral in Port-au-Prince it seems to us, and to an overwhelming majority of others, that it would have been far more just, truthful and bigger for Rodman to have admitted that the miracle of painting which took place in the Cathedral was due to

one fact and one alone — that the Bishop, the Director of the Centre d'Art and he himself had succeeded in breaking down our natural inhibitions, making us feel free to express ourselves, as we had done before in paintings, on the dedicated walls of a Cathedral. Unhappily, in his article, Rodman has proven once and for all that he is not a man of this generosity or stature.

PHILOMÉ OBIN
TOUSSAINT AUGUSTE
PRÉFÈTE DUFAUT
RIGAUD BENOIT
WILSON BIGAUD
ADAM LEONTUS
CASTERA BAZILE
FERNAND PIERRE
PIERRE MONOSIET

March 18, 1952
Oakland, New Jersey

Dear Sir:

While it saddens me that my friends, the primitive artists, have permitted their names to be signed to a letter as malicious and misleading as the one printed above, I fully understand the economic sanctions that have been brought to bear. That Préfète Dufaut, who had not even had the original article "analyzed" for him by Messrs. Peters and Borno, should have instructed them to "sign his name to whatever we decided to write" is indication enough that his fellow artists felt they had no alternative but to sign whatever Messrs. Peters and Borno should place before them. The technique, while abhorrent to democratic organizations, is well known.

Apart from the innuendo of the letter as a whole, I cannot pass over the specific tissue of misstatements regarding the financing of the 1951 murals. The ultimate benefactor did not "promise on the spot" to give anything beyond help in raising funds should I come to New York for that purpose. The promise and the generous gift followed our conversations there. The letter, about which Messrs. Peters and Borno are so disparaging, was not mine but the benefactor's. If there was objection to the allocation of less than a fifth of the total sum to my expenses — amounting to more than three times that share during a period of almost a year — it should have been made by Messrs. Peters and Borno at the time, not a year later.

The article, which is being reprinted by the State Department for distribution among its cultural officers abroad, speaks for itself. Having given the lion's share of the credit to the genius of the artists and the vision of Bishop Voegeli — not only in this magazine but in "Harper's Bazaar" and "The Magazine of Art" — it surely detracts nothing from that credit to mention the obstacles, technical, psychological and political, that had to be overcome in the actual direction without which no mural project so complex has ever been successfully integrated.

SELDON RODMAN

